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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 005960

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2015

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [MASS](#) [IN](#) [PK](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: MHA ADDRESSING TERRORISM, WILLING TO CONSIDER
ENHANCED COOPERATION

Classified By: CDA Robert O. Blake, Jr. for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary: Special Secretary (Home) KP Singh told Charge, Consul General and Poloff on August 1 that recent terrorist attacks in India, while worrisome, represent a return to past levels of higher terrorist activity to which India was accustomed. He identified several new MHA initiatives to increase security, including increased coastal patrolling and a proposed national biometric ID card, and welcomed the suggestion of regular information sharing with the USG on terrorist threat reporting in India and possible ATA aid for MHA's coastal security initiative. End Summary.

Blas about Recent Up-tick

12. (C) Singh downplayed Mission and media concerns that the recent spate of terrorist attacks in Ayodhya, Srinagar, and on a Delhi-bound train represented an up-tick in terrorist activity, saying rather that terrorists have not relented in their efforts, and the current tempo is simply a return to levels of terrorism seen two to three years ago. In the face of mounting circumstantial evidence and media speculation, he discounted the idea that New Delhi has become an operational hub for underground terrorist networks, nor did he perceive a threat to foreigners or Americans in particular, but admitted that as the national capital New Delhi remains a high-profile target. The terrorists in India are receiving support from the South Asian neighborhood, Singh remarked, adding that he was hopeful international pressure would "tighten the screws" on militant groups and repress their activities. (Comment: Singh's efforts to downplay the terrorist violence are consistent with recent comments made by Army Chief of Staff JJ Singh and others. End Comment.)

Supports Intel-Sharing Meetings

13. (C) In the meantime, Singh continued, the ease with which terrorists could enter India from Nepal and Bangladesh, and the inability to distinguish Indian citizens from nationals of neighboring countries made it impossible for heightened security and police awareness alone to intercept all terrorists. He added that the key to anti-terrorist operations was obtaining good intelligence in order to disrupt planned attacks. When the Charge suggested regular information sharing meetings as a way to strengthen anti-terrorist cooperation, Singh agreed, requesting that the Embassy propose such a program by letter to the Home Secretary. Embassy will follow up.

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MHA Projects: Coastal Security and ID Cards

14. (C) Singh identified securing India's long coastlines as one of his particular priorities, noting that the Indian Navy and Coast Guard have insufficient assets to intercept unauthorized vessels landing along the coast. He told us that MHA is funding a "Coastal Security Scheme" to provide coastal states' police agencies with armed high-speed patrol boats equipped with surveillance and night vision gear. The program is starting with Maharashtra and Gujarat although in those states the additional patrol boats and bases will be allocated to the Indian Coast Guard instead of the state police.

15. (C) The Charge pointed out that the USG has several specialized agencies with experience in intercepting small boats due to our drug interdiction efforts, and said the USG would welcome specific suggestions for training or other cooperation. Singh immediately dispatched an assistant to ask the Director General of the Coast Guard to suggest any areas for assistance, and told us he would pass along any requests.

16. (C) MHA is also in the middle of a pilot program to develop a national biometric (fingerprint-based) smart identification card, Singh said. The pilot project is being conducted in 14 locations of varied geographic, demographic and urban/rural settings around the country, and enrolls 3 million citizens. MHA has finished the data collection and photography, is now issuing the cards, and expects to

complete the pilot study in four months. Singh commented that he was not sure all the stakeholder government departments were fully supportive, but he remained enthusiastic about the increased security potential of a nationwide biometric identity card. In addition to identifying suspected infiltrators from Pakistan, he suggested, the proposed ID system would permit an instantaneous verification of the nationality of Indians arrested in other countries and awaiting deportation (see septel on a proposal to speed up the verification of Indian nationals awaiting removal in the US).

Comment: The Devil is in the Bureaucratic Details

17. (C) Singh appeared very receptive to our suggestions for possible ATA programs for the Indian Coast Guard, regular information sharing on terrorism, and even a suggestion that a nationwide fingerprint ID database could be used to verify US visa applications. However, implementation of each of these proposals is sometimes difficult due to Indian concerns over sharing too much internal security information with the USG. We will try to cut through the latent suspicion at MEA and MHA to attempt to bring these ideas to fruition. End Comment.
BLAKE